

In the claims:

1. (currently amended) An apparatus comprising:

a first device, which includes a first stick having a first tip;

a second device which includes a second stick having a second tip; and

a third device, which includes a first hollow tube in which a spring is located;

wherein the first device is connected to the third device so that the first stick can pivot with respect to the third device;

wherein the second device is connected to the third device so that the second stick can pivot with respect to the third device;

wherein in a rest state, the spring causes the first stick to be separated from the second stick so that the first tip and the second tip do not contact each other;

and wherein the first stick and the second stick can be pressed together into a compressed state, so that the first stick pivots with respect to the third device, the second stick pivots with respect to the third device, the spring is compressed by the first and second devices, and the first tip and the second tip come into contact with each other;

and wherein the first hollow tube and the spring are distinct from each other.

2. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein

the third device includes a block portion, which is fixed to the first hollow tube.

3. (original) The apparatus of claim 2

wherein the first device includes a second hollow tube connected to a first extension,

wherein the first stick can be inserted into the second hollow tube;

wherein the first extension can be inserted into a first slot of the block portion;

wherein the second device includes a third hollow tube connected to a second extension; wherein the second stick can be inserted into the third hollow tube; and and wherein the second extension can be inserted into a second slot of the block portion.

4. (original) The apparatus of claim 3 wherein

the block portion includes a first opening through which a first pin can be inserted to connect the first device to the third device and to allow the first device to pivot with respect to the third device;

and the block portion includes a second opening through which a second pin can be inserted to connect the second device to the third device and to allow the second device to pivot with respect to the third device.

5. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 wherein

wherein the first device includes a second hollow tube and a first fastener;

wherein the first stick can be inserted into the second hollow tube and attached to the second hollow tube by the first fastener;

wherein the second device includes a third hollow tube and a second fastener; and

wherein the second stick can be inserted into the third hollow tube and attached to the third hollow tube by the second fastener.

6. (original) The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising

a container for storing the third device.

7. (currently amended) A method comprising:

providing a first device, which includes a first stick having a first tip;  
providing a second device which includes a second stick having a second tip; and  
providing a third device, which includes a first hollow tube in which a spring is located;  
connecting the first device to the third device so that the first stick can pivot with respect to  
the third device;

connecting the second device to the third device so that the second stick can pivot with  
respect to the third device;

wherein in a rest state, the spring causes the first stick to be separated from the second  
stick so that the first tip and the second tip do not contact each other;

and wherein the first stick and the second stick can be pressed together into a  
compressed state, so that the first stick pivots with respect to the third device, the second stick  
pivots with respect to the third device, the spring is compressed by the first and second devices,  
and the first tip and the second tip come into contact with each other;

wherein the third device includes a block portion, which is fixed to the first hollow tube;

wherein the first device includes a second hollow tube connected to a first extension;

wherein the first stick can be inserted into the second hollow tube;

wherein the first extension can be inserted into a first slot of the block portion;

wherein the second device includes a third hollow tube connected to a second extension;

wherein the second stick can be inserted into the third hollow tube; and

and wherein the second extension can be inserted into a second slot of the block portion.

8. (currently amended) The method of claim 7 wherein

the first hollow tube and the spring are distinct from each other.

~~the third device includes a block portion, which is fixed to the first hollow tube;~~

9. (canceled)

10. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 Z wherein

the block portion includes a first opening through which a first pin can be inserted to connect the first device to the third device and to allow the first device to pivot with respect to the third device;

and the block portion includes a second opening through which a second pin can be inserted to connect the second device to the third device and to allow the second device to pivot with respect to the third device.

11. (currently amended) A method comprising:

providing a first device, which includes a first stick having a first tip;

providing a second device which includes a second stick having a second tip; and

providing a third device, which includes a first hollow tube in which a spring is located;

connecting the first device to the third device so that the first stick can pivot with respect to the third device;

connecting the second device to the third device so that the second stick can pivot with respect to the third device;

wherein in a rest state, the spring causes the first stick to be separated from the second stick so that the first tip and the second tip do not contact each other;

wherein the first stick and the second stick can be pressed together into a compressed state, so that the first stick pivots with respect to the third device, the second stick pivots with respect to the third device, the spring is compressed by the first and second devices, and the first

tip and the second tip come into contact with each other;

The method of claim 7 wherein

the first device includes a second hollow tube and a first fastener;

wherein the first stick can be inserted into the second hollow tube and attached to the second hollow tube by the first fastener;

wherein the second device includes a third hollow tube and a second fastener; and

wherein the second stick can be inserted into the third hollow tube and attached to the third hollow tube by the second fastener.

12. (new) An apparatus for holding and using a first chopstick and a second chopstick comprising

a first hollow tube connected to a first extension;

a second hollow tube connected to a second extension;

a device having a first slot and a second slot opposite the first slot;

a spring attached to the device and oriented so that in a rest state the spring is substantially perpendicular to the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube;

wherein the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube are biased by the spring, so that in the rest state, the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube are substantially parallel to each other;

wherein the first extension lies at least partially inside of the first slot;

wherein the second extension lies at least partially inside of the second slot;

wherein the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube are spaced apart;

and further comprising a first pin inserted through an opening in the first extension and through a first opening in the device, wherein the first pin thereby connects the first extension to the device so that the first extension and the first hollow tube can pivot to at least some extent with

respect to the device using the first pin as a first pivot point;

a second pin inserted through an opening in the second extension and through a second opening in the device, wherein the second pin thereby connects the second extension to the device so that the second extension and the second hollow tube can pivot to at least some extent with respect to the device using the second pin as a second pivot point;

wherein the first pivot point and the second pivot point differ;

wherein the first chopstick can be inserted into the first hollow tube and the second chopstick can be inserted into the second hollow tube so that in the rest state the first chopstick and the second chopstick are substantially parallel to each other.

13. (new) The apparatus of claim 12 wherein

the device is a block structure which in the rest state is substantially perpendicular to the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube.

14. (new) The apparatus of claim 12 further comprising

the first chopstick; and

the second chopstick.

15. (new) The apparatus of claim 12 wherein

the first extension is fixed to an outside surface of the first hollow tube and the first extension projects outward substantially perpendicularly from the outside surface of the first hollow tube; and

the second extension is fixed to an outside surface of the second hollow tube and the second extension projects outward substantially perpendicularly from the outside surface of the

second hollow tube.

**16. (new) The apparatus of claim 12 wherein**

the spring lies within a third hollow tube, wherein the spring is distinct from the third hollow tube;

wherein in the rest state, the third hollow tube is substantially perpendicular to the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube;

and wherein the third hollow tube is fixed to the device.

**17. (new) The apparatus of claim 13 wherein**

the block structure has a first curved surface, which is adjacent the first hollow tube and which limits the extent to which the first hollow tube can pivot which respect to the device; and

the block structure has a second curved surface opposite the first curved surface, wherein the second curved surface is adjacent to the second hollow tube, and the second curved surface limits the extent to which the second hollow tube can pivot with respect to the device.

**18. (new) The apparatus of claim 12 wherein**

the first hollow tube and the second hollow tube are spaced apart by about the length of a dimension of the device.